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SUBJECT: ANBAR PROVINCE -- THEN AND NOW

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (U) Summary. Provincial government officials re-opened parts of the war-damaged Government Center in central Ramadi on July 26 amid signs of continuing security improvements. According to MNF-West records, there were 82 security incidents in the province for the week ending July 25, the lowest weekly tally since records began in January 2005. The reduced level of violence compares to the 450-480 incidents typically recorded on a weekly basis last summer and fall. Today the city of Ramadi, a battlefield six months ago, is no longer under insurgent control. Last summer and fall, provincial and municipal governments were non-existent or in disarray. Today, the Provincial Council has returned to Ramadi, virtually every city and town has a mayor and a functioning local council, there are more police recruits than there are places to train them at the police academy, tribal leaders have come off the fence and openly cooperate with us, and public opinion has turned against Al-Qaeda. There is a mood of rising expectations for the better delivery of essential services. A missing piece in our counter-insurgency strategy is the flow of GOI funds for capital projects. Money is flowing, but not in amounts to meet needs or satisfy expectations. End summary.

Return to Ramadi

[1](#)3. (U) In a low key ceremony in Ramadi on July 26, Anbar Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed and Provincial Council Chairman Abdulsalam Abdullah cut the ribbon on the reopening of the Provincial Government Center, a complex of a dozen war-damaged buildings in the center of the city. The event marked the formal return of the provincial government to its official seat of power. Provincial officials abandoned the center in March 2006 amid insurgent violence. Members of the Provincial Council fled to the relative safety of Baghdad and many civil servants went underground. For much of the past 15 months, Gov. Ma'amoun has been virtually the sole official to venture to the Government Center, and that was on an irregular basis and while guarded by a company of US Marines.

[1](#)4. (U) However, with the recent improvement in Anbar's security, the functions of government have begun to return to Ramadi. After a year's absence, the Provincial Council began meeting in the city last March, convening in rented villas or at MNF-West's Camp Blue Diamond on the city outskirts. The directors general and other civil servants re-emerged in May. In recent weeks, Gov. Ma'amoun has held staff meetings attended by some 30 directors general. Such meetings could not have been held six months ago.

[1](#)5. (U) At the ribbon-cutting, Ma'amoun formally re-opened the war-damaged governor's office building, now partially restored with MNF-West CERP funds. Plaster and a fresh coat of paint hide the hole in his office ceiling caused by the impact of an insurgent mortar shell last December. Later, PC

Chairman Abdulsalam cut the ribbon to the Provincial Council temporary chambers, also renovated with CERP funds. USAID contractor RTI purchased the furniture and equipment. Some 35 Council members were present as Abdulsalam called the body to order for its inaugural session.

Decline in Violence

¶6. (U) The rededication of the Government Center took place against the backdrop of continuing improvements in Anbar,s security. According to MNF-West records, there were 82 security incidents in the province for the week ending July 25, the lowest weekly tally since records began in January ¶2005. It was the second consecutive week in which incidents fell into double digits, and compares to the 450-480 incident rate typically recorded on a weekly basis last summer and fall.

¶7. (SBU) The Ramadi area itself shows an even more dramatic decline in violence than the province as a whole. The area recorded only eight security incidents for same reporting period, compared to the 130-180 weekly incidents last fall and winter. Since June 1, there have been at least 14 days in the Ramadi area where no security incidents were recorded at all. Today the city of Ramadi, a battlefield six months ago, is no longer under insurgent control.

Anbar Then and Now

¶7. (U) The decline in violence is only one indicator in the generally favorable turn of events that has emerged in the past six to twelve months.

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-- Last winter Anbar,s provincial and municipal governments were non-existent or in disarray. Today the Provincial Council has returned to the capital and virtually every city and town has a mayor and functioning municipal council.

-- Last summer there were barely 4,000 police on the provincial rolls, recruitment drives were lucky to attract two dozen applicants, and several urban areas had no functioning police force at all. Today, there are 21,000 police on the rolls, the number of police recruits exceeds the available training slots, and every city and town has a functioning police force.

-- Last summer many tribes were ambivalent towards the Coalition or aligned against us. Today, tribal leaders openly cooperate with us and support Iraqi police recruitment drives. Local residents who previously shunned contact with Coalition Forces today openly socialize with them.

-- For the past several years, the criminal courts judges had ceased hearing major crimes cases because of insurgent threats. But last month some 40 Anbari judges held an unprecedented conference in Ramadi and secured approval from Iraq,s chief judge to re-start major crimes trials.

-- In the past, there was little financial and policy support from the central government. GOI funding for capital projects was minimal or nil. Today normal ties are being restored between Ramadi and Baghdad and ministerial spending is beginning to flow. Anbar,s previous feelings of estrangement from the national scene have given way to a more pragmatic approach to dealing with Baghdad.

-- Eyewitnesses say that in the past, Ramadi mosques spewed forth calls for insurrection. Today typical Friday sermons dwell on traditional themes such as one,s religious beliefs and personal conduct. The clerics have moderated their message. In some cases, they took back mosques from radical preachers.

¶8. (SBU) Nothing in this positive trend suggests that it is irreversible. Al-Qaeda is still a present danger. The enemy is looking for an opening and can strike. In late June to early July, a force of some 100 insurgents sought to infiltrate the eastern part of the province, traveling from Salah El-Din Province, through Karbala, and around the southern edge of Lake Razazza. Their aim was to assassinate tribal leaders and government officials in the Ramadi area. They were intercepted and destroyed by CF and Iraqi forces. Nonetheless, in general, the enemy has been pushed out of Anbar,s urban areas. To the extent that Al-Qaeda is present in numbers, it is in rural areas and in the wadis.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Anbar,s story line has been picked up by the international press. Al-Qaeda is on the defensive. Public opinion has turned against it. The tribes are mobilized to fight it. Today Anbar is emerging from the long night of battle into a messy and still-dangerous transition period. But there is a mood of rising expectations. As the violence abates, the public looks for the better delivery of essential services. It wants jobs, economic recovery, and responsive government. In a sense, those expectations themselves are evidence that public opinion has shifted from estrangement to getting on with the business of reconstruction.

¶10. (SBU) One feature of a successful counter-insurgency strategy is that the public must be made to feel that victory for the government side is inevitable and that the momentum of positive trends is irreversible. The re-opening of the Ramadi Government Center is another step in that process. One key missing piece, however, is central government support. The spigot of GOI capital spending has been turned on, but the flow is a trickle. Funding is not flowing in amounts sufficient to satisfy needs or to meet public expectations. Team Anbar has made great progress in brokering the reconnection of ties between Ramadi and Baghdad. We are on it. Getting the GOI to spend money on the recovery of a province that was recently a major battlefield would shore up the gains on security and deal another blow to Al-Qaeda,s dwindling power.

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